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ABSTRACT

Reading strategies can be taught at various grade levels using songs as texts. The thought-provoking song "The Greatest Love of All," sung by Whitney Houston, was used with a group of sixth-grade students, using the Reading/Singing strategy. The steps in the reading lesson were: (1) motivate the children so they will eagerly anticipate the lesson; (2) introduce the vocabulary in the song; (3) set a purpose for reading/singing the song; (4) read or sing the song's words; (5) ask questions pertaining to the song; (6) sing the song again; (7) incorporate skills or strategies into the lesson; and (8) extend/enrich the lesson. When using lyrics for reading material as opposed to basal texts, reading pressures are fewer, topics of discussion are often deeper, and overall successes are great. (RS)

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A SIXTIES STYLE READING LESSON

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A Sixties Style Reading Lesson

Do you remember songs you sang in grade school or your old high school fight song? Most likely the answer is yes. It seems most people remember words to songs and their central themes far better than they do specific stories. If that notion is true, why don't more teachers use songs as a natural source of textual material and group discussions?

Now the idea of using songs as texts is certainly not new. If you were in grade school or high school in the sixties and seventies, you probably remember analyzing the songs of such artists as Cat Stevens, Peter, Paul and Mary, or Carole King. But I have found an even more versitile way to use lyrics --to teach reading strategies to various grade levels.

I rely on a self developed Reading/Singing Strategy* that is based on the Directed Reading Activity (Stauffer, 1975). The strategy promotes vocabulary, word recognition, comprehension skills, and the incorporation of writing activities while providing appreciation of music. In each lesson the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains are addressed.

Following is an outline of a lesson I taught to a small group of sixth graders using the Reading/Singing strategy

with the song, "The Greatest Love of All," sung by Whitney Houston. This particular song's content is thought-provoking and, therefore, very similar to many songs of the sixties and seventies. The song's central premise is to have pride in oneself; the lyrics promote self worth, self-confidence, and self concept.

Description

Step 1: Motivate the children so they will eagerly anticipate the lesson. To give the children a positive attitude toward the lesson and to help them recall their prior knowledge, we talked about heroes. The students described what the term meant to them, and they identified their personal heroes.

Step 2: Introduce the vocabulary in the song.

I introduced the following words: heroes succeed pride dignity

We discussed their meanings and simply used them in oral sentences.

Step 3: Set a purpose for reading/singing the song. The children were to read the printed lyrics while listening to the tape to find out what one singer believed was "the greatest love."

Step 4: Read or sing the song's words.
The tape of the song was played as the children read. Since some of the children knew this popular song from hearing it on the radio, two of the girls sang along.

Step 5: Ask questions pertaining to the song.
The following questions were asked about, "The Greatest Love." What did this singer believe was the greatest love? What does the statement "I decided long ago never to walk in anyone's shadow" mean? What sorts of things give you a sense of pride?

Step 6: Sing the song again.
At this point in the lesson, the song was practiced and the children became more confident of the words. By the second playing of the song, the sixth graders with whom I worked had no word recognition difficulty. They were highly motivated children and sang the song with expertise.

Step 7: Incorporate skills or strategies into the lesson. A discussion of heroes took place. We then clustered characteristics that made people heroes. The children applied some of the thoughts to their own lives and got into a discussion about being happy with personal choices.

Step 8: Extend/Enrich the lesson.

The children were asked to draw pictures of what they thought they'd like to do with their lives or what they thought their greatest accomplishment would be. This was the most interesting part of the lesson. One boy wanted to perform heart surgery and one brain surgery. One of these pictures had the caption, "You have to have pride to do anything and you have to have pride in what you've done." (Talk about getting the main idea of this song!) Two girls asked to work together and felt that performing for other people and winning awards for the performance would be something for which to strive. One boy drew a picture of a peace negotiation.

The most touching of all of the pictures was from a girl from India. This child barely spoke during our session, even though I provided wait time and encouraged her to speak. She felt like the most rewarding thing she could do was something she had already accomplished-- teach her parrot to speak. I didn't realize the significance of this until I showed it to the principal and a colleague.

This girl was seeing a counselor to overcome her extreme shyness because she did not like to speak to other children or adults. Yet her most outstanding achievement

had to do with her ability to teach her own parrot to speak!

Songs used in this sixties style mode often provide meaningful text to teach reading strategies and open discussions on critical subjects. Using music can break some of the reading level barriers--partly because the text is shorter, partly because repetitions make it easier, and partly because singing with a group oftentimes helps overcome (or mask) word recognition problems. Whatever the reason, when using lyrics for reading material as opposed to basal texts, reading pressures are fewer, topics of discussion are often deeper, and overall successes are great.

Sources: "The Greatest Love of All." (C.W. 1977). Words by Linda Creed, music by Michael Masser, sung by Whitney Houston. Gold Horizon Music Corp. and Golden Torch Music Corp., Columbia Pictures Publication, Miami, Florida.

Stauffer, R. (1975). Directing the Reading-Thinking Process. New York; Harper & Row.